

SERVING CENTRAL FALLS, CUMBERLAND, LINCOLN, NORTH SMITHFIELD, PAWTUCKET, AND WOONSOCKET

Junior high Truancy Court gets A-plus

Most cases are now heard within 10 days, instead of the five to seven weeks it used to take.

PAWTUCKET — Since opening in April, the school district's junior high school Truancy Court has been a "dramatic success" in getting truant students back to classes, the School Committee was told last night.

According to John Waycott, School Department attendance officer, 32 students from Jenks, Slater and Goff junior high schools have been referred to the three-school court since it started April 10. Of those students, 15 have not

PAWTUCKET

missed a day of school since their first arraignments and 10 missed one day. Waycott said of those 10 single-day absences, 8 were excused.

"It is clearly evident that the Truancy Court in Pawtucket has been a dramatic success and is definitely needed in our city," Waycott told the School Committee.

He praised the guidance staffs at the three schools, which he said had to keep pace with the court's need for records and attendance information.

Truancy court is a program that Chief Family Court Judge Jeremiah Jeremiah

has been organizing in school districts across the state, including Woonsocket, Central Falls, Newport, Cranston and Providence. The idea is to have truants' cases heard quickly and to involve their families and social service agencies as soon as possible.

Magistrate Angela Bucci presides over the court, which is held every Tuesday at Jenks Junior High School.

Jeremiah has said truancy is often the first offense a future criminal commits. If the truancy problem can be fixed early, that student may never graduate to more serious crimes, he said.

Though the truancy court has the legal authority to fine or punish students or

their parents, it more often serves as a social service coordinator than p. Jeremiah has said truancy is a symptom that there are greater problems at home, such as substance abuse. Fixing them will often fix the truancy.

Before Family Court set up the truancy court at Jenks, Waycott said he had to have to draw up the papers for a case and file them in Family Court in Providence. A hearing would be held in five to seven weeks, he said.

But with Bucci holding court at Jenks, Waycott said he can get cases heard in 10 days and get weekly reports to make sure the student is attending

SEE TRUANCY, C 6

Truancy

Continued from C 1

school after that. Waycott said the prompt review of cases was a big advantage for him.

Under the former system the message that was getting sent to a truant sixth grader was that the system took two months to get to you. Now, he said, the threat of court carries the credibility of immediate consequences.

Supt. Hans Dellith said he too was pleased with the court, especially its strategy of treating truancy as a family issue and not just a student problem.

"It's very beneficial," Dellith said. "I'm not surprised, I expected it."

Since April 10, the Jenks court handled 32 cases, 3 involved sixth graders, 13 involved seventh graders and 16 involved eighth graders. Waycott's report did not break the cases down by school, but he told the committee Jenks used the court more often than Slater or Goff.

Of the 32 students, 18 were males and 14 were females. Waycott said their attendance rates ranged from 34 to 78 percent before appearing in truancy court and between 82 and 100 percent after.